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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CALCUTTA 000413

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DEPT FOR SCA/INS AND INR

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SUBJECT: SHADOW LINES - INDIA STRUGGLES WITH SECURITY ON ITS EASTERN BORDERS

CLASSIFIED BY: Henry Jardine, Consul General, AmConsulate Calcutta, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

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¶1. (C) Summary. Porous borders with Bangladesh and Burma present a serious threat to India's security that India so far has been unable to manage effectively. In West Bengal, politicians, intelligence, law enforcement, and academics all agree on the growing problem of Islamist infiltration into India via Bangladesh, though they differ in their assessment of the seriousness of the threat. Intelligence experts sound a much more alarmist note about Bangladesh, and to a lesser extent about the growing Maoist problem, than do the politicians. Though there is growing awareness of these security problems in New Delhi, it is very likely that security on the Eastern borders will continue to challenge both the national government and the states. End Summary.

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Bangladeshi Influx Provides Potential Terrorists Nexus

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¶2. (C) India shares a 4,100 kilometer land border with Bangladesh. A little more than half of that border is with the state of West Bengal, with some of it riverine but most of it flat and featureless and hard to defend. Delhi Political Counselor and Consulate Poloff met with W. Bengal Home Secretary Prasad Ray on September 5. Ray identified international terrorism from Islamists using this border as the real threat on the eastern front. The reasons he cited include the Indian Army's focus on the western areas of the country - the border with Pakistan - and inadequate resources to cover the Bangladesh border with the Border Security Force (BSF) and the internal intelligence Special Service Bureau. Ray noted the recent arrests of two Bangladeshis in connection with the Mumbai bombings, and said interrogations revealed that those responsible for the bombings had entered through the Eastern

frontier. Media have highlighted repeatedly that border guards on both sides routinely take small bribes to look the other way, resulting in thriving cross-border smuggling of goods and people.

¶3. (C) Contributing to illegal migration, political parties in W. Bengal have used the back and forth flow of people across porous borders to court voters by readily providing ration cards and identity documents in return for votes. Aside from settled migrants, a large number of people cross the border during daylight hours for work in India and return to Bangladesh at night. (Note: Ray cited the example of rickshaws in the northern Bengal city of Shilliguri, which do not operate at night because the rickshaw-wallahs have gone home to Bangladesh. End note.) Ray mentioned that, at the August 2006 Indo-Bangladesh Home Secretaries meeting, both nations agreed to a broad resolution for cooperation in tackling the terrorist problem. The Indians proposed institutionalized mechanisms, but have yet to gain agreement on these from Bangladesh.

¶4. (C) During meetings with security sector officials and academics, however, we heard a more alarmist tone. According to Deputy Director General (DG) of the Police Intelligence Branch (Borders) Dilip Mitra, the Bangladesh government is providing cover for the growing jihadist movements within Bangladesh that are increasingly tied into the political mainstream. Many law enforcement sources also connected Pakistani intelligence services with the infiltrations from Bangladesh. Mitra believes that apart from attacks in Kashmir, participants in every recent attack in India have been channeled through the East. Press reporting following the Mumbai, Nagpur, Varanasi, and Ahmedabad incidents echoed this assertion. Border Security Force Dep. Inspector Gen. S.K. Mitra (no relation) lamented the lack of adequate personnel and resources to monitor and stop entry from

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Bangladesh.

¶5. (C) Both Home Secretary Ray and Dilip Mitra noted that there is a de jure border and a de facto border between India and Bangladesh. In Mitra's terms, "There is a 10-12 kilometer stretch of land in India that is occupied by Bangladeshi migrants who have settled down." Moreover, there is a huge and growing population of Bangladeshis in Calcutta whom security forces think may provide operational support to terrorists infiltrating across the porous border on their way to operations elsewhere in India. (Comment. Ray's less-alarmist tone probably stems from his concern for maintaining peaceful relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in W. Bengal. During times of communal tensions, the GOWB has favored dialogue as a means of resolving issues. The GOWB has taken a similar approach to the growing number of madrassas in the state, co-opting and monitoring the teaching curriculum in the schools. Interestingly, Ray believed that insurgents and Islamists of any type had not (and presumably would not) act in their W. Bengal safehaven in order to continue their operations in other parts of the country without problem. End Comment).

Maoists - the less severe home grown problem?

¶6. (C) Ray spoke in much more detail about Maoist activity in W. Bengal. He did not consider the Maoists a threat comparable to international terrorists. Ray analyzed Maoist presence in W. Bengal as less severe than that in other states. In his view, new Maoist recruits in the state were not true believers in the cause, but mostly desperately poor tribals looking for food and work. (Comment: This may be due to the tendency in India to equate Maoists with the Naxalite Movement, which originated in W. Bengal, or the fact that the CPI-Maoist was originally a part of the CPM. It also reflects a belief that the CPM is a party that represents the poor, and therefore, can turn the poor away from extremism through political action. End Comment.) Ray

acknowledged that the border with Nepal was virtually open, and stated that the CPM was hoping that the Nepali Maoists would enter Nepal's mainstream political process.

¶7. (C) Journalists and academics that we met linked the Maoists in Nepal more closely to the Maoists operating in India's "red corridor" which stretches from Nepal to Andhra Pradesh and includes western areas of W. Bengal, as well as Jharkand, Chattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh. A number of journalists spoke in detail about the ease by which small arms - mostly Chinese made - crossed into northeastern states from Myanmar. They highlighted for us on maps routes used by Maoists to smuggle arms from Nepal to the south.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Perceptions of the terrorist threat from Bangladesh spanned a broad spectrum among contacts. Views ranged from seeing an extreme danger of "Pakistanization" of Bangladesh to a more circumscribed characterization of individual infiltration and small scale activities. However, all contacts agreed that there is growing evidence of terrorist links to Bangladesh. With much of India's military and security forces focused on the Pakistan border, the Bangladesh border is seen as a soft underbelly for terrorist infiltration.

¶9. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: In turn, the limited concern expressed by officials regarding the Maoist threat in W. Bengal is surprising given the continued targeting and brutal killing of CPM officials in the state. The downplaying of the Maoists may be attributable to the group being an ideological challenge to the governing CPM and therefore, too sensitive an issue to fully highlight. POL and CG Calcutta will continue to follow the issues of border instability and internal insurgencies. END COMMENT.

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